



3010 Grand Avenue
Waukegan, IL 60085-2399
Phone: (847) 377-8000
Fax: (847) 360-3656

For Immediate Release

Date: November 10, 2003
Contact: Leslie Piotrowski
847-377-8055
Marcia Stanek
847-377-8099

**Eating Sensibly at Holiday Parties Shouldn't
Be an Oxymoron**

The holiday season is a time of celebration with family, friends and co-workers. These celebrations are often viewed as times to indulge in an over-abundance of food. With multiple holiday parties in the six-week period between Thanksgiving and Christmas, indulging in all of these goodies can ultimately lead to weight gain and a New Year's resolution to lose weight.

Researchers have speculated that the average American gains between five and nine pounds over the holiday season. However, a study of 195 adults published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 2000 found an average weight gain of approximately 1½ pounds between the fall and winter. While the average weight gain between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day was **less than one pound**, the researchers concluded that the holiday period contributes the most to yearly weight change in adults.

-More-

“Although holiday weight gain was much lower than expected, very few of the people in the study lost that weight in the warmer months,” said Toby Smithson, a registered dietitian at the Lake County Health Department/Community Health Center and spokesperson for the Illinois Dietetic Association. “This sets up a cycle of weight gain every fall and winter that adds up and can be significant in adulthood.”

While the average weight gain was low for the subjects in the study, the researchers found that the participants who had a major holiday weight gain, defined as five pounds or more, were more likely to be overweight or obese at the start of the study.

Overweight and obesity affect nearly 64 percent of adults in the US. Weight gain increases a person’s risk for the development of diabetes and cardiovascular disease. In addition, significant weight adds strain to joints and contributes to orthopedic problems in the knees and hips, also making recovery from knee and hip surgery difficult.

“It may be more important, then, for overweight adults who may already be trying to lose weight to be a little more careful and conscientious about their food choices during the holidays. This is not as difficult as it sounds. It can be a matter of making some small, sensible choices,” said Smithson.

Feasting on Thanksgiving dinner alone will not lead to weight gain. The very nature of

-More-

celebrations lends itself to enjoyment and eating foods that may not be part of somebody's typical diet. Indeed, many dishes at holiday parties are served only during this time of year: eggnog, pumpkin pie, an array of Christmas cookies, turkey and stuffing with all of the fixings. The cumulative effect of multiple celebrations with richer, high-fat foods as well as increased alcohol intake results in higher caloric intake overall and is the true culprit of holiday weight gain.

"Eating sensibly at holiday parties is not an oxymoron," said Smithson. "It's a matter of balancing higher calorie foods, like desserts, with healthier choices, such as veggie platters." Smithson also advised choosing and enjoying favorite foods, even if they are higher in calories and fat, rather than wasting calories sampling every item on the buffet.

Other suggestions include eating a snack or a small meal about one hour before the party to feel full sooner and to help avoid overeating. It is also a good idea to fill a plate and eat from the plate rather than hanging around the table grazing and picking at food to keep track of how much food is eaten.

"Most importantly, stop eating once you feel full," added Smithson. "If you go overboard, don't worry or feel bad about how much you've eaten. Be sure to get back on track the next few days by choosing lower-calorie and low-fat foods to balance the calories you consumed at the party, and get physically active."

###